

STATEMENT
OF
SENATOR BYRON L. DORGAN
VICE CHAIRMAN
COMMITTEE ON INDIAN AFFAIRS
BEFORE THE
MARCH 1, 2005 HEARING
ON S. 147

I thank the Chairman for scheduling this hearing today on a bill that is very important to two of our most distinguished members of this Committee – the former Chairman and Vice Chairman, Senator Inouye, and the principal sponsor of this legislation, Senator Akaka.

I have had the opportunity to visit with the Chair of the Board of Trustees of the Office of Hawaiian Affairs, and I have learned that through this bill, the Native Hawaiian people simply seek a status under Federal law that is equal to that of America's other Native peoples – American Indians and Alaska Natives.

Federal programs for Native Hawaiians that provide support for education, health care, housing, job training and employment, and protection of cultural resources have been in place since the 1970's, and that is why the Congressional Budget Office has projected that there will be no impact on the Federal budget – whether measured in terms of budget authority or outlays – associated with the extension of Federal recognition to a Native Hawaiian government.

And to those who are concerned that this bill will give rise to conditions that may be similar to some of the less desirable dynamics in Indian country, this reorganized Native Hawaiian government will sit down and negotiate with the United States and the State of Hawaii to work out their relationships and the exercise of their respective governmental powers and authorities.

Once the three governments have reached agreements, the Congress and the legislature of the State of Hawaii will have to enact further legislation to implement their agreements. So we will have the opportunity to fully understand the nature and scope of these proposed relationships and sharing of governmental powers and authorities before we vote on legislation to make their agreements part of Federal law.

I believe that through this bill, the Senators from Hawaii have laid out a process that is not only reasonable and prudent, but which will enable the three governments to develop good working relationships with one another that will be premised upon their consensus.